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Recovering from natural disasters is slow and bureaucratic. New FEMA rules aim to cut the red tape

By REBECCA SANTANA
Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Anyone who has lived through a natural disaster and then applied to the federal government for assistance knows that it can be a lengthy, frustrating and bureaucratic process. New rules announced Friday by the federal agency in charge of emergency management aim to simplify and speed up the process.

With natural disasters now affecting more people across the United States, insurance markets in many states are buckling under the weight of payouts to those hit by wildfires and hurricanes.

Deanne Criswell, who heads the Federal Emergency Management Agency, said the changes, going into effect in March, are designed to make it easier for disaster survivors to get help — a challenge for those often struggling to recover from the worst day of their lives.



A boat sits amidst debris in the aftermath of Hurricane Michael in Mexico Beach, Fla. Oct. 11, 2018.

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Recovering from natural disasters is slow and bureaucratic. New FEMA rules aim to cut the red tape

Continued from Front

“Mother Nature is not letting up,” Criswell said to reporters on a call announcing the changes. “We need to be better prepared and better informed to recover from natural disasters faster and more effectively.”

Criswell described the changes as the “most comprehensive update to our individual assistance program in 20 years.” She said the changes were the result of a huge amount of feedback from survivors, organizations that work in disaster recovery, and elected officials.

Here are some of the changes outlined by FEMA:

HELP FOR HOMEOWNERS WITH NOT ENOUGH INSURANCE

Under previous rules, homeowners who had received payments from their insurance company for home repairs but not enough to cover all of the damage were essentially out of luck when it came to getting help from FEMA. Now those homeowners can apply to FEMA for help. Criswell gave an example of a homeowner who has \$80,000 in damage but receives only \$45,000 from the insurance company. Previously, FEMA couldn't help them because their insurance payout already exceeded the agency's assistance cap of \$42,500 per disaster. Now, that homeowner can get money from the agency to make up the difference. This rule change comes at a time when homeowners in places like Louisiana, Florida and California are facing skyrocketing deductibles and fights with insurance companies over damage assessments that have made it difficult even for people with insurance to recover from hurricanes or wildfires.

Samantha L. Montano, an assistant professor of emergency management at the Massachusetts Maritime Academy, called this change a “pretty massive internal shift” and questioned why it hadn't been done before. She said survivors are increasingly receiving estimates from insurance companies that are much lower than the cost of repairs or inspectors saying that the damage was



Federal Emergency Management Agency administrator Deanne Criswell speaks during the daily briefing at the White House in Washington, Aug. 29, 2023.

pre-existing and as such not covered. That leaves homeowners increasingly in the position that they have to sue their insurance company or figure out how to make up the difference on their own.

GETTING RID OF THE LOAN RULE

Under previous rules, disaster survivors first had to apply for a loan with the Small Business Administration and get rejected before they could apply for FEMA assistance. Criswell said survivors found the SBA application requirement “confusing and challenging,” so the agency is eliminating that requirement. Al Cathey, who was mayor of Mexico Beach, Florida, when Hurricane Michael leveled almost every building in the Panhandle beach town in 2018, said he welcomed the changes given the bureaucracy and paperwork he encountered when he went to apply for an SBA loan for his destroyed hardware store. After going to a trailer where SBA workers handed him a large packet of papers, and seeing how many people he would have to be interviewed by to get the loan, he decided it wasn't worth it

even though he was about \$200,000 short of the money needed to reopen the store. “I got frustrated with them myself. I didn't want to get involved with all that government red tape,” Cathey said Friday. “I understand the need for guidelines and policies, but, my God, the paperwork they wanted from me to start the approval process. This was a disaster, but you would think they thought I wanted the money for a vacation.”

CHANGES TO CRITICAL NEEDS ASSISTANCE

The agency has had something called critical needs assistance, currently \$750, that survivors can use for whatever they need right after a disaster: baby formula or food, for example. But states or tribal nations had to specifically request that category of assistance, and it was only done on a case-by-case basis. Now, anytime a disaster is declared that includes FEMA's individual assistance funding stream, those \$750 payments will be available. Survivors still have to apply, and there is some vetting to prevent fraud. But it bypasses the application that states and tribal nations

had to make. That doesn't mean that every disaster will include these payments. Many declared disasters are more limited in scope.

OTHER CHANGES

Disaster survivors with disabilities can use FEMA money to make changes to their homes to make them more accessible, whereas under previous rules the agency would only pay to rebuild things that had been damaged in the disaster. People with pre-existing problems in their home, like a leaky roof, can now get money from the agency to fix the house. Currently, the agency requires that if it is giving people money to fix something, it had to have worked before the disaster. And FEMA is creating a new category of aid called displacement assistance, designed to help those who can't return to their home. It gives them money for housing while they're looking for a long-term rental and has flexibility so that they can, for example, use the money to pay a friend's utilities if they're crashing on a couch.

Zack Rosenberg, the co-founder and CEO of St. Ber-

nard Project, which does recovery work across the country, said the changes are a “step in the right direction.” He said the vast majority of people their organization works with in the wake of natural disasters “hate” asking the government for help.

“For some, they see it as humiliating. For some, they see it as anathema or inconsistent in who they are. They just don't like doing it,” he said.

And then when they do, they encounter a “maze” of requests for information.

He particularly praised the changes getting rid of the mandatory SBA application, efforts to simplify the application process and the changes allowing FEMA money even if people had preexisting problems with their homes: “This will allow more resilient rebuilding.”

But, he said, the details of how the changes are communicated to people will be crucial, and he suggested other things that would help such as making the changes retroactive to people who already have claims in the pipeline. He said the SBP has also been pushing for years for one application that can be used to apply for FEMA, SBA and the Department of Housing and Urban Development, which funds longer-term recoveries.

Overall, Montano said, these are all “good and needed changes, but we still need to do more.” Like any new government policy, it depends on how things play out once the policies go into effect. And, she said, there's likely still room to improve things like the appeal process or giving survivors more time to apply for aid. And, she noted, FEMA is one part — albeit an important part — of disaster recovery. She said Congress needs to step in to increase the cap on individual assistance to disaster survivors and there needs to be more oversight of the insurance industry.

The new rules go into effect March 22. The changes are expected to cost \$671 million per year, with \$159 million of that borne by the states and tribal nations where the disasters occur. □

In snowy D.C., the March for Life rallies against abortion with an eye toward the November elections

By ASHRAF KHALIL and AL-ANNA DURKIN RICHER

Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Thousands of opponents of abortion rights rallied under falling snow on Friday at the annual March for Life, as speakers urged the impassioned crowd to capitalize on the movement's major victory in the Supreme Court and keep fighting until abortion is eliminated.

Months before a presidential election that could be heavily influenced by abortion politics, anti-abortion activists packed the National Mall carrying signs with messages such as "Life is precious" and "I am the pro-life generation." After listening to speeches, the crowd, braving frigid temperatures, marched past the U.S. Capitol and Supreme Court. One group planted in front of Court, beating a drum and chanting: "Everyone you know was once an embryo." Friday's March for Life is the second such event in the nation's capital since the June 2022 Supreme Court ruling that ended the federal protection for abortion rights enshrined in *Roe v. Wade*. Last year's march was triumphant, with organizers relishing a state-by-state fight in legislatures around the country.

Speakers praised the *Dobbs* decision that overturned *Roe v. Wade* but said it was more important now than ever to keep up the pressure on lawmakers to advance abortion



Anti-abortion activists march during the annual March for Life in front of the Supreme Court on Friday, Jan. 19, 2024, in Washington.

restrictions. "Roe is done, but we still live in a culture that knows not how to care for life," said Benjamin Watson, a former NFL player who is now an anti-abortion advocate. "Roe is done, but the factors that drive women to seek abortions are ever apparent and ever increasing. Roe is done, but abortion is still legal and thriving in too much of America."

Friday's event appeared smaller than in past years as ice and snow complicated travel plans. But the crowd was fired up as speakers, which included members of Congress and Michigan University Football Coach Jim Harbaugh, urged partici-

pants to keep fighting until abortion becomes "unthinkable." "Let's be encouraged, let's press on and hope that we can join together and make this great difference," House Speaker Mike Johnson, R-La. "We can stand with every woman for every child, and we can truly build a culture that cherishes and protects life." The snow fell heavily throughout the speeches as young people built snowmen and had snowball fights behind the stage. Near the Capitol, the crowd celebrated as a group on a balcony of the Cannon House Office building cheered on the march. "I almost didn't come when

I saw the forecast, but this is just incredible," said Stephanie Simpson, a 42-year-old grocery store employee from Cleveland, who has attended the last four marches. Roberto Reyes, a Mexican native and Carmelite friar, said: "All these people are going to remember this year's march for the rest of their lives!" Members of the crowd described overturning *Roe v. Wade* as a victory, but said the anti-abortion fight rages on. "The key message this year is that our work is not done," said Bishop Michael Burbidge, chair of the committee for pro-life activities for the U.S. Conference of

Catholic Bishops.

The movement has seen mixed results. The ruling in *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization* reverted abortion lawmaking back to the states, and 14 states are now enforcing bans on abortion throughout pregnancy. Two more have such bans on hold because of court rulings. And another two have bans that take effect when cardiac activity can be detected, about six weeks into pregnancy — often before women know they're pregnant. But abortion restrictions have also lost at the ballot box in Ohio, Kansas and Kentucky. And total bans have produced high-profile causes for abortion rights supporters to rally around. Kate Cox, a Texas mother of two, sought an abortion after learning the baby she was carrying had a fatal genetic condition. Her request for an exemption from Texas' ban, one of the country's strictest, was denied by the state Supreme Court, and she left Texas to seek an abortion elsewhere.

Movement organizers now expect abortion rights to be a major Democratic rallying cry in President Joe Biden's reelection campaign.

"The pro-abortion forces, that's one of the major things they're going to run on," said Susan Swift, president of Pro-Life Legal and a veteran anti-abortion activist. "That's one of the only things that seems to animate their base." □

Associated Press

President Joe Biden signs bill to avoid a partial government shutdown

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Joe Biden on Friday signed a short-term spending bill that keeps the federal government operating until early March.

The bill averts what would've been a partial government shutdown starting Saturday. It does not address additional aid for Ukraine, which remains in limbo as key legislators continue to negotiate a border security measure that would go in tandem with more support for Kyiv. Congress, ahead of the win-

ter snowstorm that struck Washington, D.C., on Friday, passed the short-term bill with large bipartisan majorities on Thursday. The vote was 77-18 in the Senate and 314-108 in the House.

Under the bill, funding for agencies overseeing agriculture, veterans affairs, energy, transportation and housing runs through March 1. Funding for the rest of the federal government now runs through March 8. It's meant to buy lawmakers extra time to draft full-year spending

bills through the end of the fiscal year on Sept. 30.

Speaker Mike Johnson, R-La., will continue to face pressure from House conservatives who want him to abandon a bipartisan agreement that sets overall spending levels for those full-year bills at \$1.66 trillion. Those conservatives say that is too much money, but Democrats and moderate Republicans say Congress must abide by that deal and avoid legislative dysfunction during an election year. □



The U.S. Capitol is photographed past piles of snow on Thursday, Jan. 18, 2024, in Washington.

Associated Press

How to stay healthy during cold, flu and COVID-19 season

By **CARLA K. JOHNSON**
AP Medical Writer

Winter is here, inflicting its usual array of symptoms — coughs, nasal congestion, fatigue and fever — and, this year, a new COVID-19 variant is dominating the scoreboard.

COVID-19 is leading hospital admissions among the respiratory viruses, according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Last week, 25 U.S. states had high or very high levels for respiratory illnesses with fever, cough and other symptoms. That's down from 37 states the week before, the CDC said.

Since the beginning of October, there have been at least 16 million illnesses, 180,000 hospitalizations, and 11,000 deaths from flu so far this season. The CDC said 47 children have died of flu.

January can be the worst month for these illnesses. With vaccination rates low, what can you do to protect yourself from respiratory viruses, including influenza, COVID-19 and RSV?

BACK TO BASICS

Hand-washing remains crucial to reducing the spread of viral infections. Take your time at the sink. Twenty seconds is recommended. If you feel silly singing "Happy Birthday" twice while you scrub with soapy water, count to 20. Slowly.



A pedestrian wears a heavy coat against the cold in New York, Tuesday, Jan. 11, 2022.

Associated Press

Use hand sanitizer with 60% alcohol when you don't have access to soap and water.

Also, wear a mask in crowded areas. Increase ventilation in your workplace and home.

NOT TOO LATE TO VACCINATE

In the United States, only 17% of those eligible have received the updated COVID-19 vaccine, which provides good protection against the now-dominant JN.1 variant.

It's not too late to roll up your sleeve. While you're

at it, make sure you've had your annual flu shot. Those 60 and older may want to get the RSV vaccine, which also is recommended during pregnancy to prevent RSV in infants.

WHEN YOU HAVE CHILDREN AT HOME

Young children seem to pick up every germ going around. Can their parents avoid getting sick?

This time of year, children are indoors in close quarters with other kids, touching the same toys and surfaces, said Jennifer Sonney of University of Washington School

of Nursing in Seattle. Some haven't learned to cover their coughs and they simply haven't been exposed to many illnesses, so their immune systems are still developing.

It's important to take care of yourself if you're a parent or caregiver of young children, said Sonney who is immediate past president of the National Association of Pediatric Nurse Practitioners.

"We know if you are sleep deprived or dehydrated or experiencing a lot of stress, that can compromise your immune function," Sonney

said.

Having young children is very demanding, "so all of this advice needs to be interpreted within the context of reality," she said. "Despite doing everything right, kids are still going to get colds." A special note if your baby is sick: It's a good idea to have saline drops and a bulb syringe at home. They can be used to clear mucus from tiny nostrils.

"A couple drops of saline into one nostril and suction it and then do the other side," Sonney said. "Doing that before eating and sleep is going to help a lot."

A home kit for children could also include acetaminophen or ibuprofen for fevers, tissues for runny noses and water bottles of sippy cups for staying hydrated.

TEST TO TREAT

If you do get sick, prompt testing can help determine whether you have COVID-19 or influenza. That's important to see if you need one of the medicines that can help prevent severe illness: Paxlovid for COVID-19 and Tamiflu for flu.

If you don't have a test kit at home, look for a test-to-treat site at a pharmacy clinic or health center near your. There is also a free home-based test-to-treat program for adults who are uninsured or rely on government health insurance. □

Maine has a workforce shortage problem that it hopes to resolve with recently arrived immigrants



Deqa Dhalac, poses near her home after being elected mayor of South Portland, Maine, Dec. 7, 2021.

Associated Press

By **PATRICK WHITTLE**
Associated Press

PORTLAND, Maine (AP) — Maine Gov. Janet Mills and

a state lawmaker who immigrated from Somalia unveiled a proposal on Friday to try to resolve the state's

serious worker shortage by tapping swiftly growing immigrant communities.

Maine traditionally has had among the smallest immigrant populations in the country. According to the 2020 U.S. Census, only about 4% of the state's residents were born outside the U.S.

That has been gradually changing as tens of thousands of residents descended from Somalia and other African countries have made homes in Portland and Lewiston, two of the state's biggest cities. Those arrivals helped push up the percentage of foreign-

born residents by about a percentage point between 2000 to 2022, according to census figures.

The Office of New Americans is proposed in a bill by state Rep. Deqa Dhalac, the first Somali immigrant to become mayor of a U.S. city in 2021, when she took office in South Portland. She was elected to the Maine Legislature last year. Dhalac and Mills say the bill would address shortages in critical industries including health care, education and construction.

"Improving how Maine introduces and integrates New Americans into its

communities and economy is viewed as one key strategy to address the state's workforce needs, as attracting and retaining new workers is a priority for Maine's economic future," they said in a news release. Under Dhalac's bill, among the new office's primary activities would be providing pathways for immigrant employees to obtain professional accreditation and licenses. The office would also be responsible for "engaging with businesses to increase employment, retention and advancement of immigrant employees," the proposal states. □

Now eyeing a longer haul, the U.S. reshuffles its warships in the Mediterranean

By **DEREK GATOPOULOS**
Associated Press

ON BOARD THE USS BATAAN (AP) — When attacks with missiles and drones surged in the Red Sea late last year, crewmembers of the USS Bataan worked round the clock to make sure they were shot down before reaching passing merchant vessels.

Weeks later, they are still perfecting that operation in training and simulations, along with a dozen other scenarios, despite moving north to the Mediterranean where commercial marine traffic is at little risk.

The U.S. Navy is reshuffling its warship deployment in the Middle East to maintain dominance in the region — now eyeing the longer haul as concerns mount that Israel's war on Hamas in Gaza could set off a regional conflict.

An amphibious warship, the Bataan is a multi-deck assault vessel jammed full of armored vehicles and



The USS Bataan is seen in the Aegean Sea, Greece, Thursday, Jan. 18, 2024.

Associated Press

military hardware with a lower bay that can take on water to release landing craft directly into the sea.

The ship is now leading the United States' task force in the eastern Mediterranean, following the Navy's

newest aircraft carrier, the USS Gerald Ford, which was sent home at the New Year.

The Bataan and two support ships, the USS Mesa Verde and USS Carter Hall, have a combined force of

nearly 2,500 Marines and sailors.

Marine Lt. Col. Jeremy Hawkins, a senior planner on the task force, says the makeup of the multi-role naval force is ideal for the complex nature of the con-

flict and for related regional sources of tension.

"We're able to operate really autonomously in international waters and air-space. And so it gives us a lot of freedom of operations," he said. "We're floating on a piece of America, wherever we're at."

As he spoke, a "jump jet" AV-8B Harrier roared off the deck overhead, launching a night flight designed to maintain readiness for pilots and support staff.

Now in its 15th week, the war in Gaza continues to pile tension onto multiple flashpoints in the wider region, many involving militant groups supported by Iran, including Hezbollah in Lebanon and the Houthi movement in Yemen.

"The deployment of the USS Bataan to the eastern Med is meant to do two things," said Gregory Aftandilian, a senior lecturer at the School of International Service, at the American University in Washington DC. □

African leaders criticize Israel's military campaign in Gaza and call for an immediate cease-fire

By **RISDEL KASASIRA**
Associated Press

KAMPALA, Uganda (AP) — African leaders on Friday criticized Israel for its military campaign in Gaza and called for an end to the fighting that continues take its toll on mostly civilians.

The African Union Commission Chairman Moussa Faki Mahamat described the war in Gaza as immoral and unacceptable. "We demand an immediate end to this unjust war against Palestinians and implementation of the two-state solution," he said.

Gaza's Health Ministry says more than 24,400 Palestinians have died, and the United Nations says a quarter of the 2.3 million people trapped in Gaza are starving. In Israel, around 1,200 people were killed during the Oct. 7 attack by Hamas that sparked the war and

saw some 250 people taken hostage by militants.

Mahamat was speaking at a conference in Kampala of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), a group of 120 states which aspire not to be formally aligned with or against any major power

bloc. Speaking during the meeting of heads of state at the week-long gathering, Mahamat asked the 120 member countries to demand international justice for the Palestinians.

His remarks were echoed by South African President

Cyril Ramaphosa, who called for the release of all the hostages and "the resumption of talks on a just solution that will end the suffering of the Palestinian people."

Ramaphosa further called for unhindered and expanded humanitarian access to allow for vital aid and basic services to meet the needs of everyone living in Gaza.

South Africa has filed a case at the International Court of Justice against Israel for genocide and has asked the United Nations' top court to order an immediate halt to Israeli military operations in Gaza.

"This is necessary to protect against further, severe and irreparable harm to the rights of the Palestinian people," Ramaphosa said. At the start of the conference on Monday, the Pal-

estinian ambassador to the U.N. called on the members of the Non-Aligned Movement to put pressure on Israel to implement a cease-fire in Gaza after 100 days of war with Hamas.

In his opening speech, Ambassador Rayid Mansour said despite resolutions by the U.N. General Assembly and the Security Council, a cease-fire remained elusive.

The Non-Aligned Movement, formed during the collapse of the colonial systems and at the height of the Cold War, has played a key part in decolonization processes, according to its website.

Mansour compared Israel's military assault on Gaza to apartheid, the system of white minority rule in South Africa which was finally abolished in 1994. Israel rejects such allegations. □



Dennis Francis, president of the U.N. General Assembly, speaks during the 19th summit of Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) in Kampala, Uganda, Jan. 19, 2024.

Associated Press

Pakistan seeks to de-escalate crisis with Iran after deadly airstrikes that spiked tensions

By **MUNIR AHMED** and **JON GAMBRELL**

Associated Press

ISLAMABAD (AP) — Pakistan's political and military leaders on Friday moved to de-escalate tensions with Iran after this week's deadly airstrikes by Tehran and Islamabad that killed at least 11 people and marked a significant escalation in fraught relations between the neighbors.

The decision was apparently reached at a meeting of Pakistan's National Security Committee, chaired by caretaker Prime Minister Anwaarul-Haq-Kakar on his return home after cutting short his trip to the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland. Pakistan's powerful army chief Gen. Asim Munir attended the meeting.

A statement after the meeting said the leadership discussed the situation following the Iranian airstrikes and praised the "professional, calibrated and proportionate response" by Pakistan's military.

The committee stressed that existing communication channels between



Supporters of a religious group 'Markazi Jamiyat Ahle Hadith Pakistan' hold a demonstration to condemn Iran strike in the Pakistani border area, in Lahore, Pakistan, Friday, Jan. 19, 2024.

Associated Press

Pakistan and Iran "should be used to address each other's security concerns in the larger interest of regional peace and stability," according to the statement. Pakistan on Thursday launched airstrikes against alleged militant hideouts inside Iran, in the Sistan and Baluchistan province, killing at least nine people.

The strikes followed Iran's attack Tuesday on Pakistani soil that killed two children in the southwestern Baluchistan province.

The unprecedented cross-border strikes threatened to imperil ties between Tehran and Islamabad the two have long regarded each other with suspicion over militant attacks and

also raised the threat of violence spreading across the Middle East, already unsettled by Israel's war with Hamas in Gaza.

In Iran, the state-run IRNA news agency reported on Pakistan's efforts to reduce the tensions and said Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amirabdollahian spoke to his Pakistani counterpart,

Jalil Abbas Jilani.

The two sides want to cooperate moving forward and return each other's ambassadors to Tehran and Islamabad, IRNA said. The diplomatic envoys were pulled home amid the escalation. Pakistan's military went on high alert on Tuesday, after Iranian airstrikes targeted an alleged hideout of Jaish al-Adl, the Sunni separatist group behind multiple attacks inside Iran.

Pakistan's retaliatory strikes Thursday targeted alleged hideouts in Iran of Pakistani separatist groups called the Baluch Liberation Army and the Baluchistan Liberation Front.

Iran said the airstrikes killed three women, four children and two men near the town of Saravan along the Pakistani border.

The dramatic and sudden Pakistan-Iran escalation also came on the heels of Iranian airstrikes late Monday in Iraq and Syria. Those airstrikes were in response to a suicide bombing in Iran by militants from the Islamic State group in early January that killed over 90 people. □

Former Sinn Fein leader Adams faces a lawsuit in London over bombings during the 'Troubles'

By **BRIAN MELLEY**

Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — Former Sinn Fein leader Gerry Adams faces a lawsuit by three people who were wounded in bombings attributed to the Irish Republican Army that date back more than 50 years, a judge said Friday.

Adams can be sued as an individual but not as a representative of the IRA, Justice Michael Soole ruled. The judge also threw out a claim against the IRA, saying the group could not be sued because it was not a legal entity.

Adams is one of the most influential figures of Northern Ireland's decades of conflict and led the IRA-linked

party Sinn Fein between 1983 and 2018. He has always denied being an IRA member, though former colleagues have said he was one of its leaders.

The three claimants are seeking to prove Adams was responsible for bombings in England during "the Troubles," referring to three decades of violence involving Irish republican and British loyalist militants and U.K. soldiers. Some 3,600 people were killed most in Northern Ireland, though the IRA also set off bombs in England.

The three claimants are John Clark, a victim of the 1973 Old Bailey courthouse bombing in London, Jonathan Ganesh, a 1996

London Docklands bombing victim, and Barry Laycock, a victim of the 1996 Arndale shopping center bombing in Manchester. They allege Adams was a leading member of the IRA during those events and was on its decision-making Army Council.

Adams "acted together with others" to "bomb the British mainland" and was "directly responsible" for decisions to place devices in 1973 and 1996, they said in court.

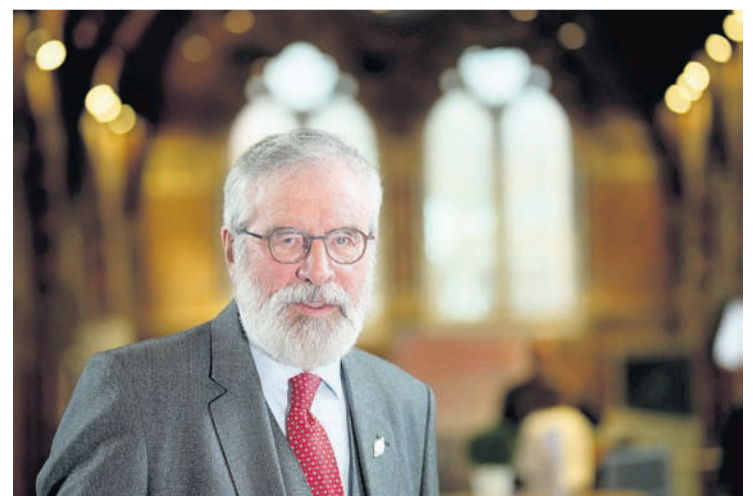
If they prevail, they are seeking only 1 pound (\$1.27) "for vindicatory purposes."

The case is likely to be the one of the final court efforts by victims of the Troubles to

seek any type of justice in court after the controversial Legacy and Reconciliation Act set a cut off last

May to file lawsuits.

Attorneys for the victims said this case filed in 2022 was the last to make it. □



Former President of Sinn Fein, Gerry Adams, speaks during an interview on the first day of a three-day international conference at Queen's University Belfast, Northern Ireland, on April 17, 2023.

Associated Press

Today is going to be a good day

(Oranjestad)—Here's why: Aruba Today collected some things to do BEYOND the beach. Yes, we know. Aruba, located 15 miles north of Venezuela in the warm waters of the southern Caribbean, is home to beautiful white-sand beaches, 82-degree days, and thus ideal for the perfect beach day. But we are also blessed with some of the warmest people in the world and our island is 19.6 miles long and 6 miles across, with a total area of 70 square miles. Bit more to discover than the white stretch on the coastline we say. Let's mention some of these hidden gems.

Nature Calls



The Arikok National park is worth the ride. We love the hikes that are guided by the park's rangers whose job is to maintain trails and protect natural resources. The flora and fauna are beautiful and the historical sites tell you about the island's indigenous roots. The guided tours are even free of charge. If you are not up to walking, you can drive through the park, one way or another this park is a great place to spend an entire day. Cruising through the landscape you end up at some of the most stunning beaches like Dos Playa or Daimara Beach. In Total the park consists of 7907 acres protected nature with a richness of animals living in it. The Aruban whiptail lizard (cododo), Aruban cat eye snake (santanero) and endangered rattle snake (cascabel) are just some of them, you can also admire these close in the park's Visitors' Center. For more information, visit the website www.arubanationalpark.org

Philip's Animal Garden



To stay with the animals, let's hop to an amazing place. Something different to do, an experience that is to be enjoyed by people of all ages. Welcome to Philip's Animal Garden. We are not talking about a zoo here, this is actually a sanctuary for all types of creatures, from

horses to peacocks, kangaroos to turtles, monkeys, goats, and many, many more different species. The place was founded in 2009 and it is the only organization rescuing and rehabilitating exotic animals in Aruba, which has resulted in an amazing collection of these animals. They provide a suitable living environment for all the rescued animals. Up until now the owner, Philip, has built this shelter with his own efforts; building all the cages from scratch, designing all structures and welding them with his own bare hands. His goal is to upgrade the facilities to a world-class animal shelter with veterinary care and round-the-clock staffs. With the input from the Aruban community and visitors they provide the best care for these animals. Please check out their website for more information: www.philipsanimalgarden.com.

The Lighthouse



No, you would not think of this as a hidden gem. The California Lighthouse is actually one of the most known highlights in Aruba and many repeated guests most probably took the ride uphill already. But, there is a significant change to this tower. Since September 2016 you can climb the top. In 2015 Stichting Monumentenfonds started the restoration of the California Lighthouse. The project finished in September 2016 and the Lighthouse is now open for visitors to enjoy the beautiful view from the top. The construction of the California Lighthouse started in 1915. The name 'California' came from a vessel of the West India Company and Pacific Steamship Co. called 'California' that shipwrecked in the area in 1891. Therefore they came up with the idea of building a lighthouse that could indicate the island's eastern tip to ships with its light. www.arubalighthouse.com will give you more information.

Kayak in the Mangroves



Mangel Halto at Savaneta is definitely a place not to miss out on. The beautiful beach with the natural mangroves is simply a beauty, but if you

are into a more active way to enjoy the nature: take a kayak. While you are doing some workout -as it might get a little windy and rough-, you will see the island from a different perspective. You can even make a stop to do some snorkeling at the reef. Its fun, it's healthy and for sure something else. There are several companies that offer kayak tours, we had good experience with The Shack Kayak Tours Aruba, find them on Facebook.

Take an "off-road" sightseeing tour



A must-do activity on the island is for sure taking an off-road sightseeing tour. If you have a rented car, you can drive through the north-eastern side of Aruba and explore the natural pools, caves, rock formations and gorgeous view of the Atlantic Ocean. To access most of these sights, like the natural pool (Conchi) and the Guadirikiri and Fontein caves, you must enter through the Arikok National Park and buy a day pass. Then you drive up the rugged road that leads you through the white dunes, caves and along the wind turbines. Other locations, like the Ayo and Casibari Rock formation are situated more in the center of the island, and are free for guests, 24 hours a day.

Go for a shopping spree in the city center



Need a new bathing suit? Head to the city center of Oranjestad, where there is countless of different stores—both high end and more affordable—that can offer you the service you deserve! Local shopping stores often offer a more affordable price, and have a variety of clothes, shoes, bathing suites, purses and more. Along the Royal Plaza strip, there are numerous jewelry stores with great quality jewelry. In the Renaissance mall, you can shop high-end luxury brands, like Dolce & Gabbana, Kate Spade, Louis Vuitton and more.

Around the high-rise hotel area near Palm Beach, the Paseo Herencia Mall contain a variety of shopping stores, restaurants, small food stands and even a movie theater! □

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Another Treasure of Aruba's Beaches: Sea Glass!

NOORD - It is hard to imagine this happening today, but years ago people dumped all kinds of refuse straight into the ocean, including old cars, and their household garbage, which of course included lots of glass. Over the next 30 years the pounding waves cleaned the beach, by breaking down every-

thing but glass and pottery. The pounding waves washed the trash up and down, back and forth. Tons of polished, broken glass pieces were created by the pounding surf. These smoothed, colored glass particles then settled along the sea shore in millions, and that is why you can find these beautiful and

colorful pieces on the north shore beaches of Aruba.

Especially on the strip on white sand between the famous "Natural Bridge" and the huge red anchor close to "Grapefield" beach you will be able to find your own pieces of sea glass. The sea glass that was created is the product of a very long and interesting process. It can take anywhere from 10 to 30 years to make sea glass. The name for any piece of glass that finds its way to the ocean and tumbles around in the water long enough is "Sea glass.



short-sighted mistakes we were making that could have potentially ruined these beautiful beaches. But thanks to natural processes, the ocean transformed the trash into the sea glass. Each colored gem on the beach has its own story. The ruby red glass stones are typically from old car tail-lights.

beer), green (Heineken & Balashi beer) and clear glass which are the soft much loved "soft drink" bottles.

If you like to see the sea glass for yourself, and be in awe of the power of nature, rent a car or jeep and go explore our deserted beaches on the north side of the island. Make it a fun family day!

Even if we didn't mean to pollute the Beaches how we did, it is inspiring to see just how the earth can correct our mistakes.

Funny, how trash can change into treasures!

Everybody knows that you are not allowed to take local shells home, but the people working at the airport have no problem you taking sea glass home. A few of those pieces make great souvenirs. You can place them in a wine glass or large bottle for decoration and every time you look at it a smile will light up your face thinking back of your unforgettable Aruba vacation! ☐



Happy birthday to Renee Power!



(Oranjestad)—We at Aruba Today would like to wish Renee Power a most happy birthday with an early birthday shout out while she and her husband, John, are visiting us from the New York.

Renee has been coming to Aruba for 18 years, and her husband says she looks forward to spending her birthday in Aruba on Sunday, January 21st, when she'll be turning 57!

For the past 18 years, the Power couple has always stayed at the Tamarijn, and enjoyed a wonderful dinner at the Red Parrot on her birthday....it's a

tradition! Renee, when you see this, we hope you have the most beautiful day, filled with love and joy. Your husband wanted us to send you a message on his behalf, so here goes:

"If you see Renee enjoying the sun, sand, and a drink on the beach at the Tamarijn be sure to wish her a Happy Birthday!"

Renee enjoys spending her birthday in Aruba with her husband John. They have met so many wonderful friends over the years, and the staff at the Tamarijn always welcomes them "home".

For years, the water beat against the different kinds of trash being dumped. Glass, household appliances and even motor parts were discarded on the beach. The waves and weather conditions wore down the overwhelming amount of garbage in the water, creating millions of beautiful smooth rocks.

It's hard to believe the

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Aruba to me



ORANJESTAD — You are back and we would like to portrait you! By inviting you to send us your favorite vacation picture while enjoying our Happy Island.

Complete the sentence: Aruba to me is Send your picture with that text (including your name and where you are from) to: news@arubatoday.com and we will publish your vacation memory. Isn't that a special way to keep your best moments alive? Please do note: By submitting photos, text or any other materials, you give permission to The Aruba Today Newspaper, Caribbean Speed Printers and any of its affiliated companies to use said materials, as well as names, likeness, etc. for promotional purposes without compensation.

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paper, we strive to make you a happy reader every day again.

For today we received a lovely message from Rebecca Kober.

She wrote to us saying:

"Aruba to me.....I was 19 years old when my parents and I spent 4 days on the wonderful island of Aruba in 1979. Not a long vacation but enough time for me to fall in love with beautiful Palm Beach. I never felt such soft powdery sand. I returned in

1987 with my husband, we rented a car and explored the island....such wonderful memories. Life continued and we were raising 2 sons. In 2017 we planned a trip to Aruba including our youngest son. Early in the year, I needed heart valve surgery and things went majorly wrong during surgery, I ended up on life support. I honestly remember making peace with dying but then I remembered our planned trip and how much I wanted to return to Aruba. This gave me the incentive to fight so I

can say Aruba saved my life. We had another wonderful vacation after I recovered from surgery. We returned in 2022 and now we will be celebrating our 40th wedding anniversary in June 2024. So much has changed since 1979

Photo attached is the Natural Bridge in 1979, so glad I was able to see it."

Thank you for sending us this wonderful message sharing what Aruba means to you with us and our readers! ☐

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Aruba's Nature is to be Cherished

ST. CRUZ — The national park Arikok comprises almost 18 % of the island. Its rugged terrain, desert-like hills filled with tall cacti, breathtaking coastline and protected local flora and fauna welcome you to be explored. There is numerous wildlife to discover like for example the sea turtle who lays his eggs on the park's beaches. There are more places on the island that are a preserved area like the Bubali Plas which is a bird sanctuary.

The national park Arikok takes you on a memorable journey of the islands past offering unique geological, cultural and historical sites. These can all be enjoyed and explored either on your own or during guided tours. A wide variety of educational and informative programs and fun activities is available.

Did you know that four of the in total

seven species of sea turtle lay their eggs on Aruba's beaches? In the national park, a Least Tern (*Sternula antillarum*) keeps a strict eye on a very special event taking place below on the beach: a majestic Leatherback (*Dermochelys coriacea*) heads back to sea after laying her eggs, while another nest laid 2 months ago by the same female hatches. A very rare occurrence of daytime nesting and hatching. Sea turtles prefer nesting in the cool and dark hours of the night. And hatchlings usually wait for the cue of cooling surface sand before emerging.

Bubali Magic

This beautiful close-up image of the pink bird is courtesy of Michiel Oversteegen of the Aruba Birdlife Conservation. This important foundation showcases and builds awareness of Aruba's birds and other native flora and fauna. You may have seen a

'pink cloud' lately at the Bubali or Spanish Lagoon Wetlands areas? It's most likely to be Roseate Spoonbills (*Ajaia ajaja*) or 'Chucharon Cora' as they are known in Papiamentu. This unusual looking bird forages in shallow muddy water while sweeping its flattened bill from side to side to catch small fish, crustaceans and other aquatic invertebrates. The Roseate Spoonbill remains an uncommon sight as they are vulnerable to degradation of feeding and nesting habitats (Wetlands). (Source: arikok national park)

The aforementioned is just a part of what Aruba's nature has to offer. We cannot stress enough to go, see for yourself. The island has the most beautiful beaches but it is also worthwhile to go beyond this and get an idea of our entire island. Lately there is a discussion going on about the effect certain activities have



on our nature, for example the ATV vehicles cause a lot of dust, noise and leave tire tracks. Animals live in these areas where the vehicles run, often with high speed and with detrimental consequences to flora and fauna. Motorized vehicles are forbidden to drive on the sand dunes in the Northern part of the island and all beaches in Aruba are forbidden for any motorized vehicle. Treasure our island to enjoy it like you do: as a tropical and natural paradise. We truly appreciate it! □

Aruba's tourism recovery

ORANJESTAD — According to the latest UNWTO data, Caribbean destinations experienced a 67% fall in international tourist arrivals in 2020 compared to the previous year. Aruba seems to have been suffering the most by being 90% dependable on a single economic pillar. Given the reliance of many destinations on the sector, this has placed large numbers of livelihoods and businesses at risk by idling, therefore making timely restart of tourism vital.

This crisis gives us an opportunity to rethink how the tourism sector should be and how tourism can contribute to people and 'planet-island.' How can we rebuild this sector better? How can we make it more sustainable, inclusive and resilient? We urgently need all sectors related to tourism to work together to restart this sector for the benefit of all. For this reconstruction, sustainability and innovation must be given a



prominent place.

At this time, as an island

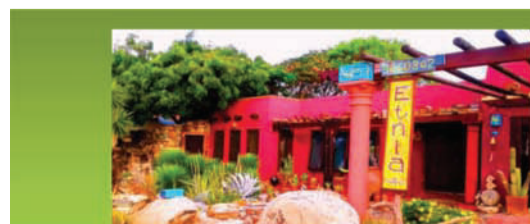
nation, we must stand at that point where government, commerce and the



general public, must determine our character and make an unconditional choice for the island's future. Tourism is the best hope we have; however highly consider mistakes we made in the past and keep in mind Aruba's geographical limitations, in order to guarantee a fair standard of living and a good quality of life. Redefine the product as a destination. Reconsider all assets. Recognize and respect local essences of island's cultural aspects together with all native species and things, since they are running the risk of disappearing or becoming extinct. It is in hand of the general public to participate, requesting and demanding proper legislative protection that safeguard and guarantees the existence of our ecosystems for future generations. We must create awareness of our, yet unfathomed assets, which could be lost without ever knowing of their existence. Respect and protect archeological

grounds and rock formations. Clean up the house for our own sake. We listen very encouragingly to visitor's complaints and issues that worries our loyal return travelers, we also consider all warnings of product saturation, loss of friendliness and attention etc. The best of all is that we are very optimistic and we have high expectations to which we are ready to tackle the challenges ahead, the great ones and the not so great, as well. The moment to re-educate and relocate locals in to the hospitality service job market is now. Recovery is eminent since many are jobless due to the health situation and work force reduction.

To get to know more about Aruba and its origins, its animals and culture, we highly recommend you to book your visit for our renowned cultural encounter session has been entertaining curious participants for decades. Mail us at etnianaativa03@gmail.com to confirm your participation. Our facilities and activities take place close to high rise hotels. □



Article by: Etnia Nativa

Whatsapp us +297 592 2702 and book your Aruban experience

Etnia Nativa is close to the high rise hotels



Visit the island's popular cave sites!



(Oranjestad)—Among the endless sea of dark brown sand and cacti, there are two caves hidden in the outskirts of San Nicolas, in the north-eastern area of the island. These caves, The Quadirikiri cave and The Fontein Cave are open to visitors of the Arikok National Park, so if you ever decide to take an “off-road” tour in the park, be sure to visit these prehistoric caves...and be sure to bring a flashlight!

Quadirikiri Cave

Known for its two chambers accompanied by a skylight, the Quadirikiri Cave is the most popular cave among locals and tourists, as it is easy to walk through and provides great lighting for pictures.

As with all prehistoric or ancient sites, there is always a folk legend that adds to the lore and mystery of the site. The Quadirikiri cave is no different. The most well-known legend behind the cave could be considered as Aruba's first love story, as it tells the tale of the undying love between the chief's daughter and her beloved. As legend would have it, the chief disapproved of his daughter's choice of lover, as he thought him unworthy. Stubborn and filled with anger, the daughter refused to turn away her beloved.

So, the chief decided to lock her up in the Quadirikiri

Cave, in hopes that she would soon calm down and turn away her lover. Her beloved, in turn, was locked away in the Tunnel of Love (Now known as the Huliba Cave).

Through the pathways underneath the Tunnel of Love running up to the Quadirikiri cave, the two love birds found each other, and refused to let each other go. Because of their stubbornness, they both died in the Quadirikiri Cave, their ascending spirits burning two holes in the ceiling of the cave. This is why the cave has two holes through which sunlight passes through to illuminate the chamber.

Though there have been discoveries of Amerindian drawing on the wall, these have mostly been ruined by vandalism. However, the Fontein Cave further up north, provides a better glimpse in prehistoric Amerindian paintings.

Fontein Cave

Longer than the Quadirikiri Cave, the Fontein Cave contains pathways that stretch to the limestone walls further down. Here is also where prehistoric drawings can be seen. Though this cave does not have its own legend, this was speculated to have been occupied—or at least used by prehistoric Arawak settlers on the island for rituals and other spiritual

ceremonies.

The Huliba Cave/ Tunnel of Love

The Huliba Cave, formerly known as the Tunnel of Love, was once open to the public, and was the biggest and most accessible of all three caves. This cave had five chambers, including one that is heart-shaped. This cave had narrow stairs that led to long pathways deep into the cave, with a staircase leading to the exit on the other side. In one of the chambers, there used to be the carving of the Virgin Mary, put there for the protection of the cave.

However, the Huliba Cave has been permanently closed for a few years now, as a way to preserve the bat population that lives in the cave. These Long Tongue Fruit Bats and Insect Eater Bats are very important to the ecosystem of the island. Though this cave is no longer accessible to the public, it surely is interesting to learn more about the history of these caves and the Awarak tribes that resided or utilized them.

Do note that these caves are very dark, humid, hot, and are inhabited by bats. Do wear comfortable clothing and shoes, as the pathways in these caves may be rough and bumpy, and don't forget to bring a flashlight!☐

Note to visitors:

Due to heavy rainfall in the past few days, Arikok National Park has informed that they have closed the Quadirikiri Cave until further notice for the safety of visitors.

Fontein remains open from 9am to 4pm.



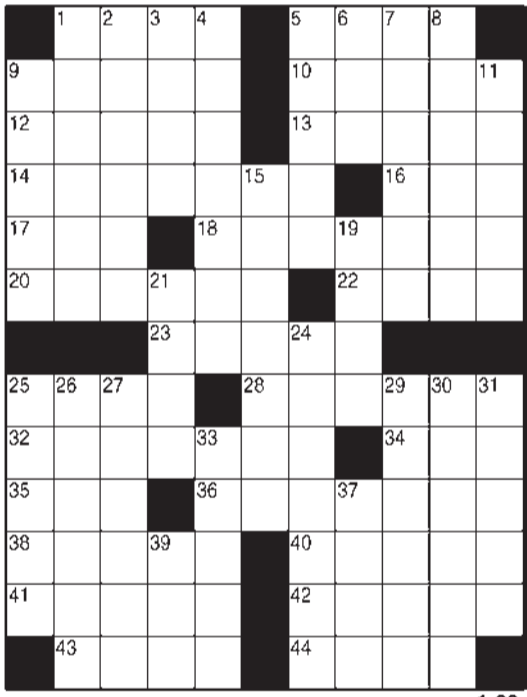
CROSSWORD

By THOMAS JOSEPH



Yesterday's answer

- ACROSS**
- 43 Head
 - 1 Toot one's own horn
 - 5 Stepped on
 - 9 Shop tool
 - 10 Judge's wear
 - 12 Solitary sort
 - 13 Biscotti flavor
 - 14 Clumsy
 - 16 Miniature
 - 17 Zero
 - 18 Away from the wind
 - 20 Places
 - 22 Crumb carriers
 - 23 Ballot caster
 - 25 Mexican coin
 - 28 Historical records
 - 32 External
 - 34 West of films
 - 35 Vein yield
 - 36 Cruise worker
 - 38 Can't get enough of
 - 40 "Divine Comedy" writer
 - 41 Church topper
 - 42 Milk container
- DOWN**
- 1 Waste an opportunity
 - 2 Irritate
 - 3 Over again
 - 4 TV's
 - 5 Commerce
 - 6 Darling of baseball
 - 7 Luke's mentor
 - 8 Dry expanse
 - 9 Schemes
 - 11 Future flowers
 - 15 Computer command
 - 19 Caution
 - 21 State frankly
 - 24 Finished
 - 25 Places for laps
 - 26 Atlas section
 - 27 Plant-based sweetener
 - 29 Mystery writer
 - 30 Cross
 - 31 Ali of "Heroes"
 - 33 Passover meal
 - 37 Farm animals
 - 39 Walk in water
 - 39 Goof



A XYDLBAAXR
is LONGFELLOW

One letter stands for another. In this sample, A is used for the three L's, X for the two O's, etc. Single letters, apostrophes, the length and formation of the words are all hints. Each day the code letters are different.

1-20

CRYPTOQUOTE

W O B M B R Q E V A R E W B M
A R W O V K W Q E V A , E V Q L M R E D
A R W O V K W Q K E Q O R E B , S E F E V
O S L L R E B Q Q A R W O V K W
G V J L S E R V E Q . — X V M B S E
L M V P B M I

Yesterday's Cryptoquote: COOKING IS LIKE LOVE. IT SHOULD BE ENTERED INTO WITH ABANDON, OR NOT AT ALL. — JULIA CHILD

Millennial Money: 4 strategies for using side hustles to fund retirement savings



Cash is fanned out from a wallet in North Andover, Mass., June 15, 2018.

Associated Press

By ELIZABETH AYOOLA of NerdWallet

At the start of 2022, I panicked after realizing I was in my early thirties with only about \$4,000 saved for retirement.

Once the panic subsided, my solution was to use side hustles to fast-track my retirement savings. Within two years, I was able to use my freelance and 9-to-5 income to grow my retirement savings by over \$100,000. Here are some strategies I used to achieve my goal.

1. DRAFT A RETIREMENT PLAN

Over the years, I hadn't put much thought into when I wanted to retire or how much I would need. I got started by reading online articles and using a retirement calculator.

Drafting a retirement plan was a cathartic process it challenged me to think about what lifestyle I want during retirement and how much that could cost. I landed around the \$2 million mark, which was initially a shock to my nervous system because I only

had around \$4,000 saved. I arrived at this number by inputting my ideal retirement age, life expectancy, monthly contribution, monthly budget and other variables into a retirement calculator.

The retirement calculator also helped me break down how much I needed to save monthly to reach my lofty goal.

2. CREATE AN INVESTING STRATEGY

Before hunting for freelance gigs, I wanted to make sure I had an investing strategy in place. It's easy to spend freelance money before it hits your checking account; I would know because I've done it one too many times.

"As a side hustler, your go-to accounts for saving for retirement are the IRA, the Roth IRA, the SEP IRA and a solo 401(k)," says Alleson Tate, a certified financial planner and founder of Avere Wealth Management in Atlanta.

These types of accounts can help maximize retirement and health care savings.

To hit my monthly savings goal, I planned to divide my side hustle income into five pots: my emergency savings fund within a high-yield savings account, my 401(k), an IRA, a health savings account and a standard brokerage account. I also planned to max out my allowable contributions to my 401(k), HSA and IRA as my income increased.

3. BUDGET

Eventually, I found multiple consistent freelance writing gigs by focusing on securing high-paying clients who would provide consistent work over an agreed period of time. I was a regular contributor for some online platforms and also had private clients to whom I provided articles. I used job boards, cold emails and tapped my network.

Although most of my freelance income was consistent, some contracts didn't get renewed.

This meant I had to have a solid budget in place and revisit it regularly to stay on top of my saving goals.

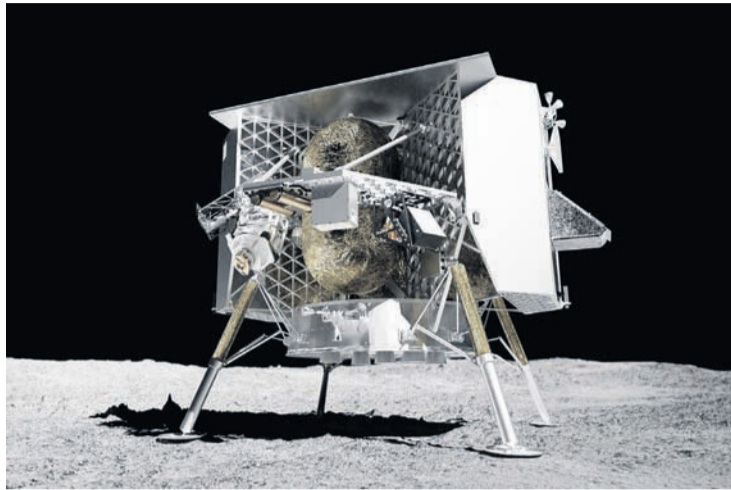
Tate suggests using a 50/30/20 budgeting system to manage your side hustle income, which NerdWallet also recommends for primary income. With this method, 50% of take-home income goes to needs, 30% to wants and 20% to savings, debt and investments.

"Everyone's percentages need to be adjusted according to their own lifestyle and financial priorities," Tate says. "But that would be a really great starting place."

I was frequently adjusting my budget allocations. Some months, I was investing too much and didn't have enough in my emergency fund, while other times, I wasn't leaving enough for bills. I went overboard with the leisure and self-care bucket a few times, and during months when I had less side income, I had to reduce my savings. □

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Private U.S. lander destroyed during reentry after failed mission to moon, company says



This illustration provided by Astrobotic Technology in 2024 depicts the Peregrine lunar lander on the surface of the moon. Associated Press

By MARCIA DUNN
AP Aerospace Writer
CAPE CANAVERAL, Fla.
(AP) — A U.S. company's failed moonshot ended with a fiery plunge over the South Pacific, officials confirmed Friday.
 Astrobotic Technology said contact and then tracking was lost as its lunar lander reentered Earth's atmosphere Thursday, 10 days after launching from Florida. It received confirmation Friday from U.S. Space Command that the spacecraft broke apart during its final moments, CEO John Thornton said.
 A fuel leak shortly after liftoff had nixed any chance of a moon touchdown. "What a wild adventure we were just on," Thornton said. "Certainly not the

outcome we were hoping for and certainly challenging right up front." After consulting with NASA and other government experts, Astrobotic took steps to destroy its crippled lander in order to protect other spacecraft. Flight controllers at the company's Pittsburgh headquarters briefly fired the engines, getting the lander in the right location for reentry despite little fuel.
 Thornton said an investigation board will be convened to determine what went wrong. Engineers suspect a stuck valve in the propellant system caused a tank to rupture. "We were coming from the highest high of the perfect launch and came down to a lowest low" when the

tank burst a few hours after liftoff, he told reporters. The 6-foot-tall (1.9-meter-tall) lander, named after the Peregrine falcon, made it all the way out to the moon's orbit, more than 240,000 miles (390,000 kilometers) away, before doing a U-turn and hurtling back toward Earth. It was the first U.S. lunar lander in more than a half-century. The next one is set to blast off next month, built and operated by Houston's Intuitive Machines. NASA paid millions of dollars to the two companies to fly its experiments to the moon, part of an effort to commercialize lunar deliveries ahead of astronauts' arrival.
 Right before Friday's U.S. news conference, a lunar lander from Japan touched down on the moon, but it was unable to generate crucial solar

power. The U.S., Russia, China and India have successfully landed spacecraft on the moon and only the U.S. has landed astronauts. Astrobotic's lander carried a variety of experiments including five from NASA as well as ashes and DNA from 70 space enthusiasts, including "Star Trek" creator Gene Roddenberry □



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Djokovic into the 4th round after beating Etcheverry in his 100th Australian Open match

By JOHN PYE

AP Sports Writer

MELBOURNE, Australia (AP)

— With 100 matches at the Australian Open and a record 24 titles across the four majors, Novak Djokovic is well placed to judge how he's progressing at a Grand Slam.

And he's starting to feel better about his health and his game after winning in straight sets Friday for the first time this tournament with a 6-3, 6-3, 7-6 (2) victory over Tomas Martin Etcheverry.

With it, he improved to 92-8 at Melbourne Park, where he's won the title 10 times and extended his winning streak to 31 matches.

"I played better than I did in the first two rounds, so that's a positive change, I guess," he said. "Starting to feel better game-wise and physically, as well. It's positive signs."

Only Roger Federer (117 matches and 102 wins) and Serena Williams (105 matches and 92 wins) have played more matches at the season's first major.

Djokovic has had a virus and been dealing with a sore right wrist. He lost sets in each of the first two rounds against 18-year-old Croatian qualifier Dino Primzic



Novak Djokovic of Serbia celebrates after defeating Tomas Martin Etcheverry of Argentina in their third round match at the Australian Open tennis championships at Melbourne Park, Melbourne, Australia, Friday, Jan. 19, 2024.

and Alexei Popyrin, when he challenged a heckler to "say that to my face."

Against Etcheverry, he didn't even face a breakpoint.

Not that No. 30 seed didn't challenge him, really going for his ground strokes and chasing down drop shots to the point where he had to veer off court to avoid the net in the third set and nearly crashed into the um-

pire's chair.

As he got closer to victory, Djokovic started to put his index finger to his ear after each winner, urging more support from the crowd.

He closed with a pair of aces and said the win was "the best performance I had during this tournament."

Next up he faces 35-year-old Frenchman Adrian Mannarino, who won a

five-setter for the third straight round to advance 7-6 (4), 1-6, 6-7 (2), 6-3, 6-4 over U.S. Open semifinalist Ben Shelton.

Djokovic walked onto Rod Laver Arena when the match between lefthanders Mannarino and Shelton was going into the second set on the nearby Kia Arena. He was in a post-match news conference when the result of that match was re-

layed to him. Noted.

Djokovic beat Shelton in the U.S. Open semifinals one match before capturing his 24th Grand Slam singles title, and there was tension in the wake of it.

He copied Shelton's "Hang up the phone!" celebration gesture after that win and it has been a source of tension ever since. Reports in the French media last week had Djokovic confirming he mocked it in retaliation to some provocation.

On Friday, he elaborated. Djokovic started out by saying he had no problem with Shelton's overt confidence and recalled how he may have rankled one of the stars of the game earlier in his own career.

"I know certainly Federer didn't like the way I was behaving at the beginning," he said. "I guess I wasn't the favorite type of guy to some of the top guys because I was not afraid to say that I want to be the best player in the world." But, he added, "I never, ever lacked respect."

"Whenever I start a match, before the match or finish the match, I would always greet the opponent, always acknowledge," he said. □

Associated Press

U.S. national team midfielder Samantha Mewis retires from soccer because of knee injury



United States' Samantha Mewis, center, reacts after scoring against Thailand during the Women's World Cup Group F soccer match at the Stade Auguste-Delaune in Reims, France, Tuesday, June 11, 2019.

Associated Press

By ANNE M. PETERSON

AP Sports Writer

Samantha Mewis, who played for the U.S. squad that won the 2019 Women's World Cup, has retired from soccer because of a knee injury that has sidelined her from the national team since the Tokyo Olympics. Mewis, 31, underwent the first of two knee surgeries shortly after the Olympics in 2021. Her final match for the United States was a 4-3 victory over Australia for the bronze medal.

"With both sadness and clarity, I am retiring from professional soccer," she

said in a statement on social media. "Unfortunately, my knee can no longer tolerate the impact that elite soccer requires. Though this isn't what I wanted, it's clear that this is the only path forward for me."

The midfielder scored 24 goals in 83 appearances over eight years with the national team. At the 2019 World Cup in France, Mewis started in five games, including the tournament-winning final match against the Netherlands. She scored two goals and had three assists over the course of the event.

Mewis announced that she will serve as editor-in-chief of The Women's Game on the Men in Blazers Media Network. "Soccer has put so many wonderful things in my life, but the most wonderful thing has been the people. To all my family, friends, teammates, and fans, I truly feel that we did this together and I'm extremely grateful," she said. Mewis was the 2020 U.S. Soccer women's Player of the Year. She last played professionally for the Kansas City Current of the National Women's Soccer League. □

Building a Super Bowl champion starts with figuring how who gets all the power

By **ROB MAADDI**
AP Pro Football Writer

There's no shortage of accomplished head coaches available to NFL teams in this hiring cycle.

Bill Belichick won six Super Bowls in New England. Pete Carroll won one in Seattle. Jim Harbaugh just led Michigan to a national championship. Mike Vrabel was the AP Coach of the Year just two seasons ago.

But owners have more to consider than impressive resumes. Often, it comes down to power.

The amount of power owners are willing to give coaches can determine the direction a franchise takes in its search.

Belichick gained full control of personnel decisions with the Patriots after winning his third Super Bowl. After Tom Brady left New England, he couldn't win games because fewer of his moves worked out. Carroll was vice president of football operations in Seattle so he had final say on personnel decisions over general manager John Schneider. Now, it's Schneider's team after Carroll won only one playoff game over his last seven seasons.

Harbaugh ceded personnel control to GM Trent Baalke when they were in San Francisco. Harbaugh led the 49ers to three



Former New England Patriots head coach Bill Belichick, left, and Patriots team owner Robert Kraft, right, stand together during an NFL football news conference, Thursday, Jan. 11, 2024, in Foxborough, Mass., to announce that Belichick, a six-time NFL champion, has agreed to part ways with the team.

straight NFC championship games and a Super Bowl appearance in his first three seasons and was 44-19-1 in four years before he lost a power struggle to Baalke in 2014. Harbaugh isn't requiring control over personnel decisions despite a poor experience in San Francisco that he once labeled as being "micromanaged" by Baalke and CEO Jed York. The 60-year-old Harbaugh seems to be headed to the Los Angeles Chargers, who also are looking for a new GM. They've interviewed

candidates with connections to Harbaugh, who also has met with the Falcons. Hiring a general manager positioned to have a strong working relationship with Harbaugh is imperative for the Chargers. They have a franchise QB in Justin Herbert and could become a championship contender quickly with Harbaugh. Belichick talked about being willing to relinquish some of his personnel duties to stay in New England but owner Robert Kraft didn't agree that would work.

"All of us need checks and balances in our life," Kraft said last week. "We need what I say I call it, we need doctor 'no's' around us, people to protect us from ourselves. And, as things evolve and you get more power, sometimes people are afraid to speak up. I'm speaking about all companies. I think it's good to have checks and balances, but once you have it, it's kind of hard to pull it away and expect to have the accountability you want." Belichick has already in-

Associated Press

terviewed with Atlanta and he's getting a second meeting with owner Arthur Blank and team brass.

The Falcons haven't made the playoffs since 2017. They've had six straight losing seasons. General manager Terry Fontenot hasn't added a franchise quarterback or bona fide edge rusher in three drafts but tight end Kyle Pitts, wide receiver Drake London and running back Bijan Robinson are talented players who would benefit from playing with a legitimate No. 1 QB.

Giving the 71-year-old Belichick the keys to the organization makes sense for the 81-year-old Blank. The Falcons have the No. 8 pick in the draft, plenty of salary cap space and play in a weak division. That has to be attractive for Belichick, who is 15 wins away from passing Don Shula for No. 1 on the career list.

The Seahawks, Chargers, Commanders, Titans, Raiders and Panthers also have openings but Belichick doesn't seem to be a fit for any of them either because of control or preference. The Philadelphia Eagles could be in the market for a new coach if they fire Nick Sirianni after he meets with owner Jeffrey Lurie on Friday. □

Matt Carpenter returns to St. Louis Cardinals, signing after release by Atlanta Braves

ST. LOUIS (AP) — Matt Carpenter is returning to the St. Louis Cardinals, agreeing Friday to a one-year contract with his team from 2011-21.

Carpenter agreed to a deal for the \$740,000 major league minimum, which will be offset against his guaranteed \$5.5 million salary as part of a \$12 million, two-year contract he signed with San Diego in December 2022.

"When you think of players that helped shape our success in the 2000s, Matt Car-

penter's name is one that is synonymous with winning," Cardinals president of Baseball Operations John Mozeliak said in a statement.

"Matt showed from the very beginning of his career how hard work and determination can lead to success, and we are excited to have his leadership and experience back in a Cardinals uniform."

A first baseman and occasional outfielder, Carpenter was traded to Atlanta last month along with \$1.5 mil-

lion, then released by the Braves three days later. In effect, Carpenter costs the Braves \$3.26 million, the Padres \$1.5 million and the Cardinals \$740,000.

Carpenter was an All-Star in 2013, '14 and '16. He has .260 career average with 175 homers and 644 RBIs for the Cardinals, Yankees and Padres. He hit .176 with five homers and 31 RBIs but had just 50 at-bats from July 1 on. Carpenter didn't play after Sept. 10 because of right elbow inflammation. □



St. Louis Cardinals' Matt Carpenter applauds after hitting his 300th career double during the sixth inning of a baseball game against the San Diego Padres Saturday, Sept. 18, 2021, in St. Louis.

Associated Press

Weekly SPECIALS



| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| <p>WAS \$17.14</p> <p>\$13.71</p> <p>Per KG</p>  <p>Rib Eye</p> | <p>WAS \$22.85</p> <p>\$17.14</p> <p>Per KG</p>  <p>Minute Steak</p> | <p>WAS \$10.28</p> <p>\$9.14</p> <p>Per KG</p>  <p>U.S. Boneless Porkloin</p> | <p>WAS \$15.14</p> <p>\$11.42</p> <p>Per KG</p>  <p>Mix Ground Beef/Mula cu vet</p> |
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| <p>WAS \$2.45</p> <p>\$1.86</p> <p>Each</p>  <p>Gwoon Sinas Vanille Ijsjes 430gr</p> | <p>WAS \$1.71</p> <p>\$1.49</p> <p>Each</p>  <p>Frisian Flag Skimmed Milk 1L</p> | <p>WAS \$3.97</p> <p>\$3.42</p> <p>Each</p>  <p>Danish Chef Kaasspread Naturel 85gr</p> | <p>WAS \$5.65</p> <p>\$5.08</p> <p>Each</p>  <p>Hawaiian Punch Fruit Juicy Red 128oz</p> | <p>WAS \$11.37</p> <p>\$9.65</p> <p>Each</p>  <p>Quaker Oats Old Fashioned 42oz</p> |
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DIARY/FROZEN

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| <p>WAS \$5.14</p> <p>\$3.86</p> <p>Each</p>  <p>Dr.Dokter Pizza Funghi</p> |
| <p>WAS \$3.06</p> <p>\$2.29</p> <p>Each</p>  <p>Gwoon Oven Bamischijf 4st</p> |

HBC/GM

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|---|
| <p>WAS \$8.57</p> <p>\$7.42</p> <p>Each</p>  <p>Irish Spring Moisture Blast 20oz</p> |
| <p>WAS \$8.45</p> <p>\$7.31</p> <p>Each</p>  <p>Brut Splash-On Aftershave Lotion 7fz</p> |

DELI/BAKERY

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| <p>WAS \$2.11</p> <p>\$1.82</p> <p>100 GR</p>  <p>Havarti Danish Cheese</p> |
| <p>WAS \$1.88</p> <p>\$1.59</p> <p>100 GR</p>  <p>Mortadella</p> |

DRY FOOD

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|---|--|---|---|---|
| <p>WAS \$3.14</p> <p>\$2.85</p> <p>Each</p>  <p>Argo Corn Starch 16oz</p> | <p>WAS \$2.45</p> <p>\$2.28</p> <p>Each</p>  <p>Fish Sauce Top Kitchen 750ml</p> | <p>éxito</p> <p>WAS \$3.19</p> <p>\$3.19</p> <p>Each</p>  <p>To Eat Marca Exclusiva Galletas con Trufa 175gr</p> | <p>éxito</p> <p>WAS \$2.28</p> <p>\$2.28</p> <p>Each</p>  <p>Frescampo Beans with Bacon 300g</p> | <p>WAS \$1.65</p> <p>\$1.48</p> <p>Each</p>  <p>Kleenex Tissues Soft White 2ply 70pcs</p> |
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